

TITLE OF THE INVENTION

WET-TYPE ELECTROPHOTOGRAPHIC PRINTER WITH PHOTOCATALYSTIC FILTER

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] This application claims the benefit of Korean Patent Application No. 2002-54544, filed September 10, 2002, in the Korean Intellectual Property Office, the disclosure of which is incorporated herein by reference.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

[0002] The present invention relates to a wet-type electrophotographic printer, and more particularly, to a wet-type electrophotographic printer provided with a photocatalystic filter that uses a plasma for completely decomposing a carrier vapor of a high concentration through oxidation, thus being capable of filtering and deodorizing dirt- containing air.

2. Description of the Related Art

[0003] Generally, an electrophotographic printer is categorized according to a developing method into a dry type that uses powder toner, and a wet-type that uses a composition of a carrier liquid, such as norpar or toner. Both the dry type and the wet type are used in a printing process of forming an electrostatic latent image on a photoreceptor medium, such as a photoreceptor drum (body), feeding the toner onto the electrostatic latent image to develop the electrostatic latent image into a visible image, and printing the developed visible image onto a sheet of printing paper by passing the paper between a transfer medium that is rotated while being in contact with the photoreceptor body.

[0004] While the dry type electrophotographic printer has some disadvantages, such as harmful toner powders, the wet-type electrophotographic printer generates no harmful toner powders and provides an excellent printing quality. Accordingly, the wet-type electrophotographic printer is in demand.

[0005] FIG. 1 is a schematic view showing a structure of a conventional wet-type electrophotographic printer 80. As shown, the wet-type electrophotographic printer 80 includes organic photoreceptors 50a-50d, developing rollers 51a-51d, an intermediate transfer belt 70, a fusing roller 40, and laser scanning units 60a-60d.

[0006] A carrier liquid of the wet-type electrophotographic printer 80 consists of a pigment, a binder resin and a charge detector dispersed therein. For developing an image on a printing medium, such as a sheet of paper, in the wet-type electrophotographic printer 80, firstly, an electrostatic latent image is formed on the organic photoreceptors 50a-50d by laser beams emitted from the laser scanning units 60a-60d. Then, a carrier liquid is attached to the electrostatic latent image of the organic photoreceptors 50a-50d by the developing rollers 51a-51d. After that, the developed image is transferred to the printing medium. When the printing medium with the image thereon passes through the heated fusing roller 40, the carrier liquid evaporates into vapor. Since there is a hydrocarbon mixture in the carrier liquid, the vapor may include one of volatile organic compounds (VOCs), such as benzene, acetylene, gasoline, toluene, ethylene, phenol, methanol, butanol, acetone, methylethyl ketone, or acetic acid. Through a photochemical reaction with nitrogen oxide, the VOCs generate photochemical oxide, causing photochemical smog. The VOCs are poisonous chemical substances that pollute air, incite (induce) cancer, and are a precursor of the photochemical oxide.

[0007] Because of a bad smell of a carrier vapor and an environmental pollution, usage of the wet-type electrophotographic printer 80 has been checked despite advantages over the dry-type electrophotographic printer.

[0008] Particularly, air purifying machines that use a conventional photocatalyst require a UV lamp for photocatalytic activity and subsequent decomposition of an organic substance. However, the photocatalytic activity by the UV lamp, due to a considerably slow response and activation, was not enough to decompose the organic substance, such as the one in the wet-type electrophotographic printer, which accumulates to a high concentration from the beginning of printing.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0009] Accordingly, it is an aspect of the present invention to provide a wet-type electrophotographic printer having a photocatalytic filter using a plasma, which is capable of decomposing a volatile organic substance contained in a high concentration into a vapor generated from evaporation of a liquid carrier and subsequently resolving environmental problems and achieving effective deodorization.

[0010] Additional aspects and advantages of the invention will be set forth in part in the description which follows and, in part, will be obvious from the description, or may be learned by

practice of the invention.

[0011] The above and/or other aspects of the present invention are accomplished by providing a wet-type electrophotographic printer having a photocatalytic filter. The wet-type electrophotographic printer includes a discharge passage through which air inside a printer body is discharged out, at least one discharge fan positioned inside the discharge passage to guide the air inside the printer body to an outside of the printer body, and the photocatalytic filter positioned inside the discharge passage and having a photocatalytic body coated with a photocatalyst, a plasma electrode disposed on the photocatalytic body, and a plasma generator coupled to the plasma electrode to filter and deodorize the air inside the printer body.

[0012] The photocatalyst includes at least one selected from a group consisting of TiO_2 (titanium dioxide), SiO_2 and ZnO (zinc oxide). The photocatalyst is TiO_2 (titanium dioxide).

[0013] The photocatalytic body is a honey-comb matrix coated with either a ceramic or a metal.

[0014] The photocatalytic body includes at least one of $\gamma\text{-Al}_2\text{O}_3$, ZrO_2 , SiO_2 , and $\text{SiO}_2\text{-Al}_2\text{O}_3$.

[0015] The photocatalytic filter is provided with respective poles of the plasma electrode on front and rear sides of the photocatalytic body, and the plasma generator is connected to the poles of the plasma electrode.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0016] These and/or other aspects and advantages of the invention will become apparent and more readily appreciated from the following description of the preferred embodiments, taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings of which:

FIG. 1 is a schematic view showing a structure of a conventional wet-type electrophotographic printer;

FIG. 2 is a schematic view showing a wet-type electrophotographic printer having a photocatalytic filter according to an embodiment of the present invention; and

FIG. 3A is a schematic view illustrating the photocatalytic filter of the wet-type electrophotographic printer of FIG. 2.

FIG. 3B is a view illustrating the plasma electrode and the photocatalytic body of the

photocatalytic filter of FIG. 3A.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

[0017] Reference will now be made in detail to the present preferred embodiment of the present invention, examples of which are illustrated in the accompanying drawings, wherein like reference numerals refer to the like elements throughout. The embodiment is described in order to explain the present invention by referring to the figures.

[0018] Hereinafter, the present invention will be described in detail with reference to the accompanying drawings with an example of a wet-type electrophotographic printer having a photocatalytic filter.

[0019] Referring to FIG. 2, the wet-type electrophotographic printer according to an embodiment of the present invention includes organic photoreceptors 50a-50d, developing rollers 51a-51d, an intermediate transfer belt 70, a fusing roller 40, and laser scanning units 60a-60d, like a conventional wet-type electrophotographic printer, and further includes a discharge passage (duct) 30 provided near the fusing roller 40 to guide air inside a printer body 80 toward a predetermined direction, a photocatalytic filter 10 disposed inside the discharge passage 30, and a fan 20.

[0020] Since the organic photoreceptors 50a-50d, the developing rollers 51a-51d, the intermediate transfer belt 70, the laser scanning units 60a-60, and fusing roller 40 are generally known, detailed descriptions are omitted.

[0021] An air inlet of the discharge passage 30 is provided in the proximity to the fusing roller 40 and guides the air inside the printer body 80 in a predetermined direction from the fusing roller 40 to an outside of the printer body 80. The predetermined direction of externally discharging the inside air through the discharge passage 30 may vary depending on components of the printer body 80, and it may be an upper, lower, left, or right side of the fusing roller 40.

[0022] Referring to FIG. 3(A, B), the photocatalytic filter 10 includes a plasma electrode 12, a plasma generator 13 and a photocatalytic body 11 coated with the photocatalyst agent. The plasma electrode 12 includes poles disposed at both opposite sides, i.e., in front and rear sides, of the photocatalytic body 11 in an air discharging direction. Due to a considerably wide

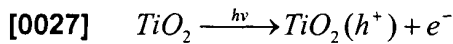
voltage gap between the both poles of the plasma electrode 12 at the front and rear sides of the photocatalytic body 11, plasma is generated, and the generated plasma causes a chemical reaction in the air passing through the photocatalytic body 11.

[0023] The plasma generator 13 is connected to the both poles of the plasma electrode 12.

[0024] The photocatalyst coated on the photocatalytic body 11 includes at least one selected from the group including TiO_2 (titanium dioxide), SiO_2 and ZnO (zinc oxide). It is possible that the TiO_2 is used for the photocatalyst.

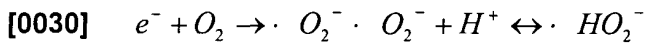
[0025] With the TiO_2 as the photocatalyst, the chemical reaction in filtering and deodorizing carrier vapor contained in the air can be expressed by the following reaction formula 1.

[0026] Reaction formula 1



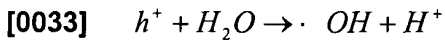
[0028] First, as the plasma generated from the plasma electrode 12 is irradiated to the photocatalytic body 11 coated with the TiO_2 , stimulated electrons (e^-) and holes (h^+) are formed by the chemical reaction of the TiO_2 as in the formula 1.

[0029] Reaction formula 2



[0031] The reaction formula 2 represents the chemical reaction in which free (stimulated) electrons (e^-) that are generated from the chemical reaction in the reaction formula 1 form hydrogen peroxide with ambient oxygen through the chemical reaction .

[0032] Reaction formula 3



[0034] The reaction formula 3 represents the chemical reaction in which the stimulated holes (h^+) generated by the chemical reaction in the reaction formula 1 form a hydroxyl group with water through the chemical reaction.

[0035] The hydrogen peroxide or the hydroxyl group formed by the free electrons (e^-) and the stimulated holes (h^+), respectively, contacts a hydrocarbon compound of the carrier vapor passing through the photocatalytic filter 10 to decompose the hydrocarbon compound into carbon dioxide and water, thereby removing a toxic property and a smell of the hydrocarbon compound from the air.

[0036] As for a source of energy supplied to the photocatalyst, such as TiO_2 (titanium dioxide), ultraviolet light can be used. Accordingly, it is possible to provide the photocatalytic filter 10 with an ultraviolet lamp in place of the plasma electrode 12 and plasma generator 13. However, it is possible, but not limited, to use the plasma to obtain more active photocatalytic reaction of the titanium dioxide because a wavelength of the plasma is shorter than that of the ultraviolet light approximately by 290nm – 340nm to 180nm – 430nm, while an intensity of the plasma having the wavelength is stronger than that of the ultraviolet light by a maximum, 120,000 a.u.t., to a minimum, 15,000 a.u.t. Also an optimum wavelength for an activation of the titanium dioxide as the photocatalyst hovers around 340nm. Furthermore, since the photocatalytic reaction by the plasma has a higher responsivity and a shorter activation time, the photocatalytic filter 10 having the plasma electrode 12 and the plasma generator 13 is effective in filtering and deodorizing the carrier vapor of high concentration fast and in great amount.

[0037] The generally-known products can be used for the plasma electrode 12 and the plasma generator 13. In this embodiment, a non-thermal plasma system is employed for the plasma electrode 12 and the plasma generator 13. The plasma electrode 12 and the plasma generator 13 in the non-thermal plasma system require a considerably high pressure to generate the plasma generation.

[0038] Since there is a high pressure around the plasma electrode 12 and the plasma generator 13, oxygen in the internal air of the printer body 80 generates ozone by the influence of the high pressure around the plasma electrode 12 and the plasma generator 13. The ozone is a component having a strong oxidation property and generates ozonide when being added with unsaturated hydrocarbon. More specifically, the ozonide is a compound formed by adding the ozone to a double or triple bond of an unsaturated organic compound. With the addition of water, the double or triple bond between carbons is severed, and the ozonide becomes a carbonyl group, generating ketone and aldehyde. In other words, the ozone generated around the plasma electrode 12 and the plasma generator 13 is involved in decomposing the

hydrocarbon compound, which is the carrier vapor. Since the wet-type electrophotographic printer having the photocatalytic filter 10 according to the present invention is capable of decomposing the volatile organic compound using the photocatalytic reaction and also using the ozone generated around the plasma electrode 12 and the plasma generator 13, the decomposition of the volatile organic compound becomes more effective.

[0039] Any one of the ceramic and the metal may be used as the photocatalytic body 11, or one selected from a group having γ -Al₂O₃, ZrO₂, SiO₂, and SiO₂-Al₂O₃ may be used as the photocatalytic body 11. The photocatalytic body 11 may be formed as a honey-comb matrix of a lattice pattern. A wider surface area can be ensured as the honey-comb matrix is more densely perforated, and more carrier vapor can be absorbed and thus decomposed by the photocatalytic reaction. Accordingly, it is possible to use a more densely perforated honey-comb matrix as the photocatalytic body 11. Furthermore, it is possible that the photocatalytic body 11 has the same outer radius as an inner radius of the discharge passage 30. The photocatalytic body 11 may be formed such that it can have a circular or square section. In other words, the photocatalytic body 11 may be formed as a cylinder or rectangular solid with no specific limit for a height thereof.

[0040] In addition to the plasma electrode 12, the plasma generator 13 and the photocatalytic body 11 coated with the photocatalyst, a carbon filter having an absorbent material may also be provided to the photocatalytic filter 10.

[0041] In order to induce an air stream in the predetermined direction, the fan 20 is provided inside of the discharge passage 30. The fan 20 may be disposed between the inlet portion of the discharge passage 30 and the photocatalytic filter 10, or between the photocatalytic filter 10 and an outlet portion of the discharge passage 30. More than 2 fans 20 may be provided.

[0042] In the wet-type electrophotographic printer, while the printing medium passes through the fusing roller 40 having a high temperature, the liquid carrier evaporates to generate harmful vapors of the hydrocarbon compound having the foul smell and the toxic property. However, with the photocatalytic filter 10 according to the present invention, the hydrocarbon compound of the vapor entering the discharge passage 30 is decomposed into the water and the carbon dioxide by the photocatalytic reaction as the vapor passes through the photocatalytic filter 10, and discharged out through the outlet portion of the discharge passage 30. As a result, the wet-type electrophotographic printer exhausts non-toxic and odorless air.

[0043] As described above, in the wet-type electrophotographic printer having the photocatalytic filter 10 according to the present invention, a harmful volatile organic compound generated in the printer body during the evaporation of the liquid carrier is decomposed into the carbon dioxide and the water when the vapor of the liquid carrier passes through the photocatalytic filter 10. As a result, an environment-friendly and odorless wet-type electrophotographic printer with a high printing quality can be provided.

[0044] Although a few embodiments of the present invention has been described, it will be understood by those skilled in the art that the present invention should not be limited to the described preferred embodiments, but various changes and modifications can be made within the spirit and scope of the present invention as defined by the appended claims and their equivalents.